procurement to ensure that mirrors are placed in ways that minimize neck, shoulder, and upper back strain for your drivers.

Another way to help is to develop driving schedules with built-in breaks. Encourage drivers to include stretching as part of their pre-trip procedures and at mid-shift, or more frequently if they desire.

Provide training to drivers and other staff in how to work most healthfully in their buses or work stations. The training should include proper driving position, proper techniques for assisting passengers, and recommended stretching and other fitness recommendations. Place training posters in driver break areas with tips about avoiding RSIs.

Finally, take drivers seriously and take action when they report problems that may be RSI-related. Early intervention is one of the best ways to avoid a chronic, painful and expensive workplace injury.

Help for transit agencies

There are many excellent local and state resources to help you with planning and implementing ergonomic and safety training programs. One such source is your insurance company, particularly your workman's compensation carrier. Many of the larger companies offer comprehensive training services to help their insureds avoid injury and subsequent losses.

A second resource may be the occupational therapy or occupational health department at your local hospital. The department may be able to provide you with in-house training or other services related to occupational safety.

Finally, there are a number of web sites, printed materials and training packages to assist with developing a program. Some suggested resources are provided in the box on page 10.

It's time to make sure our drivers are safe

Consider the ergonomics of the driver compartment in the vehicle specifications. Make sure that the emphasis in your agency is on the health and well-being of both your passengers and your drivers. Train your drivers and reward them for safe operating practices. Passengers will be safer when the driver is comfortable, with good visibility. Valuable drivers may be able to avoid long-term, debilitating injury.

Sources

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Make Sure Power Wheelchairs are Properly Secured

Lawsuit highlights challenges for drivers.

by Pat Weaver

Securing non-motorized wheelchairs on buses can be a challenge to transit drivers in the tight spaces generally available on vehicles. Power wheelchairs present a special challenge due to the generally larger size of the chair, the inaccessibility of securement points on the rear of the chair and the additional weight of an electric chair with a battery.

Lawsuit filed

According to the *Transit Access Report* published May 25, 2000, a lawsuit has been filed against the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD) charging improper securement of power wheelchairs. Three riders in Denver charged the agency with several instances of improperly securing a power wheelchair. No matter what the outcome in this specific lawsuit, the complaint emphasizes the need to be sure that drivers are thoroughly trained in the proper procedures for securing the passenger and the wheelchair. It also reinforces the importance of working with the disability community to identify acceptable solutions for chairs that are difficult to secure as a matter of safety and customer relations.

A list of some of the charges in the lawsuit help pinpoint problem areas for transit operators in general.

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Securing Wheelchairs,

continued from page 11

These charges include:

- Securing the wheelchair around the right wheel instead of the frame of the chair;
- Securing a strap to the foot pedals instead of the frame;
- Securing the strap on the bottom of one side of the chair instead of on the back bar where a "secure here" sticker had been placed;
- Securing a hook around the area where the battery charger plugs into the wheelchair; and
- Securing only one side of the wheelchair.

Cramped quarters

A Project ACTION-funded study found that in the mid-1990s there were approximately 80 manual and 20 powered wheelchair models on the market in the United States, and another three dozen scooter-type devices. Powered wheelchairs usually have rigid, non-foldable frames with batteries, motors, and controllers. The powered chair has four medium-sized wheels and all-drive components are located in the base of the wheelchair beneath the seat in an area where the straps of securement devices normally are attached.

The guidelines for a driver securing a power chair with four-point tie-downs such as Kinedyne or Q'Straint are the same as those for a non-motorized chair, except that there is more limited access.

A complete securement system includes floor and wall anchorage hardware, two front belts and two back belts for wheelchair tie-down and lap and shoulder belts. The securement straps in both front and back should be attached to the frame of the chair, not to any removable part of the chair.

The battery at the back of power wheel chair presents an extra challenge to drivers in properly securing the wheel chair on their transit vehicle.

An improperly latched system is of no value, so be sure to review the securement manufacturer's instructions for specific questions or difficulties.

Where to get advice

If you encounter problems securing certain chairs, try contacting the manufacturer for advice. Some securement manufacturers produce videos on the use of their products.

Both Kinedyne and Q'Straint, systems commonly used in Kansas, have videos available. In fact, Kansas Department of Transportation vehicle specifications require that a video be supplied with each new vehicle purchased. A copy of the Kinedyne video is in the Kansas RTAP lending library.

An improperly latched system is of no value.

Talk with passengers

In addition to following the recommended procedures of the securement manufacturer, communicate with the passenger or passenger representative to determine a suitable method for securing chairs that do not fit the standard "footprint" of the wheelchair placement on the vehicle. Good communication is a key element of both safety and positive passenger relations.

Another idea for advice

Finally, a rider advisory committee or an advisory committee representing disability groups in your community may be useful in making recommendations to meet passenger needs and to resolve complaints or conflicts.

Training materials

A new national Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) training package is available on the topic of assisting passengers with disabilities, including lift and securement use. To obtain a loan copy of this video and workbook entitled *Trading Places: Assisting Passenger with Special Needs* or the Kinedyne securement video entitled *Safe and Secure,* please see 15 of this newsletter.

Sources

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